THE REALITY OF UNCERTAINTY IN THE NOVELS OF ROBBE-GRILLET

A Thesis

Presented to

The Department of Foreign Languages

and the Graduate Council

Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

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by

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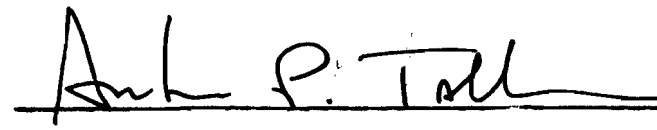
July 1969

Approved for the Major Department



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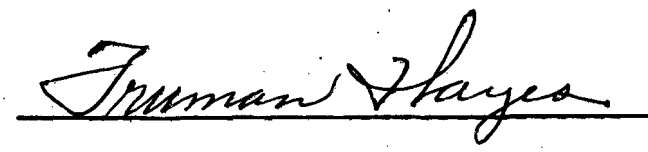

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my sincere appreciation for her invaluable assistance and guidance to Dr. Minnie Miller, former Head of the Department of Foreign Languages at the Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia.

V. D. S.

PREFACE

The "new novelists" of France are producing novels which in the eyes of some do not give the reader what he has a right to expect from the reading of a novel. This criticism is based on the traditional idea of the novel, which has existed long enough to become set in its ways. Recently, however, criticism is giving ground and is beginning to find validity in these novelists' approach to their writing.

As a leader and spokesman, Alain Robbe-Grillet is finding acceptance for his work. All of his novels listed in the Bibliography with the exception of La Maison de Rendez-vous have been translated and published in the United States. At least one of his novels, La Jalousie, is used as a college textbook. His films, L'Année dernière à Marienbad and L'Immortelle, have been shown in this country. Although it is no doubt too early to judge what place he will finally occupy in French literature, his writing is becoming well known.

In this study the writer has tried to approach his latest novel, La Maison de Rendez-vous, from an analytical viewpoint. No attempt is made here to explore Robbe-Grillet's philosophy, although it is evident that he writes from a definite philosophical attitude. It is only hoped that an examination of the form and content

of this novel will reveal his serious purpose, without which no amount of skillful technique can build a work of art.

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THE NOVEL IN FRANCE

All writers, but more especially novelists, are concerned with the expression of reality. The form and content of this expression varies not only with the individual writer, but also with the era in which he lives and produces his works. As society changes, forms of artistic expression change, reflecting new ideas, new discoveries, new attitudes, in a never-ending process of creation. The definition of reality rests with the philosophers; its portrayal concerns the novelist. For each succeeding age, this portrayal will be expressed in new ways.

No country in the Western world has maintained a more lively interest in the novel than France. The novel began its long career in that country toward the end of the seventeenth century when Mme de La Fayette wrote La Princesse de Clèves[1] and produced the first French realistic novel. In her book she expressed feelings, passions, communications, misunderstandings which anyone might experience in his own life. While her contemporaries were writing pastoral novels of shepherds and

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[1]Mme de La Fayette, La Princesse de Clèves. (Paris: Gallimard, 1958).

shepherdesses unbelievably beautiful and footloose, Mme de La Fayette may have started to think about the problem of interpreting real people, how they think, act, and react. With her princess, a woman caught in an unfortunate passion, this discerning novelist started the French novel on its pursuit of reality. The luckless princess married without love a man who loved her. In time she found herself caught up in the torment of love for another man, a love which she could not allow to be consummated except at the risk of personal disintegration. By placing her story in the French court of a century earlier, Mme de La Fayette avoided giving offense to living people (especially the sensitive Louis XIV and his censors). She increased the realistic effect of her story, moreover, by sprinkling it with historical figures, a technique well known to writers of historical novels.

What seemed real for the seventeenth century, however, did not fit the following century. The world was changing, and indeed during the eighteenth century in France few novels were published which survived to reach immortality. It was not a time for the novel. The French literary talents of the century took on the task of enlightenment in the effort to explain the explosion of scientific knowledge. The novel form did not fill the requirements of the literary needs of the eighteenth

century. Writers turned to letters, essays, and records of conversations, although the novel was not completely ignored. It became a didactic instrument through which writers like Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau presented their ideas. They were deeply concerned with this world: Voltaire with philosophies, Diderot with scientific theories, Rousseau with conscience. They used the novel form to express many of their concerns.

Rousseau's preoccupations signaled the coming of romanticism. The insistence of the romantic novelists upon full treatment of introspection brought a new kind of reality to the novel. The hero of the romantic novel did not let his deeds speak for themselves. As a matter of fact, Werther, one of the earliest of this breed, did not do much, but his thoughts and emotions were fully explained by his creator.[2] Werther's French counterparts reveled in the same outpouring of thought and feeling.

The outlook of realism began to mingle with and finally to overshadow the romantic attitude. In the nineteenth century, Balzac, the giant of the French novel, plunged his characters into the solid, stable, busy world of the bourgeoisie, where they were entirely too taken up

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[2]Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, The Sorrows of Young Werther and Selected Writings (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1962), pp. 23-153.

with the daily struggle to have time for soliloquies. Balzac's novels were full of types: Rastignac, the handsome social climber; Père Goriot, the overindulgent father; Eugénie Grandet, the saintly woman. From Flaubert's novel, Madame Bovary, came Emma, woman of discontent. Stendhal contributed Julian Sorel, man at odds with society. Novelists such as these told stories which a reader could believe might have happened. The author started the story at a beginning and told it through to a logical end. His characters, completely described, did plausible things in a stable world. The scientific discoveries and inventions of the eighteenth century had produced a well-ordered world where even the universe behaved predictably, nature was classified into neat categories, and technology was bringing physical comforts to more and more people.

But the industrialization of society brought with it new kinds of misery, reflected in literature by the school of naturalism. Realism took a somber turn into the world of poverty and struggle. Zola's creatures fought for their lives in a sordid environment.

Since the end of World War I, a cataclysm which wrenched the world into the twentieth century, novelists have sought in various ways to interpret the world to their readers. Sometimes the novel has seemed to be

losing ground to other forms of writing more "practical" and "informative." In a world deluged with scientific and technological information, this is perhaps not surprising. But the novel is a hardy variety, not likely to succumb easily.

CHAPTER II

THE "NEW NOVEL" IN FRANCE

During the fifties some of the younger French novelists began to publish novels which seemed to take a new look at the world. In fact it was such a new look that the critics wondered out loud if these really were novels. They thought up such terms as "anti-novel" and even "anti-literature." These new novels apparently lacked everything that a novel, according to tradition, should have: development of character, plot, narrative, even people. The people who did appear in the book were not described, sometimes even had no name. Enlightenment did not come to the reader at the end of the book, which did not end, but simply stopped. This was not the "slice of life" which tradition said a novel should give to a reader. The critics at first disavowed the new novel, as it came to be called, because it did not fit the time-honored definition of a novel. As one of the new novelists observed:[3]

> Les critiques ont beau préférer, en bons pédagogues, faire semblant de ne rien remarquer, et par contre ne jamais manquer une occasion de proclamer sur le ton qui sied aux vérités premières que le roman, que je sache, est et restera toujours, avant

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[3]Nathalie Sarraute, L'Ère du Soupçon (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), p. 55.

> tout, «une histoire où l'on voit agir et vivre des personnages,» qu'un romancier n'est digne de ce nom que s'il est capable de «croire» à ses personnages, et de leur donner une «épaisseur romanesque»; . . .

With increasing familiarity and more careful analysis, however, critics began to find that the new novel had something to offer its readers. Such authorities as Roland Barthes and Bruce Morrissette have championed the cause of the new novel. Some of the new novelists themselves are their own able defenders. Nathalie Sarraute, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Michel Butor have written articles and essays explaining and justifying the methods of the new novelist.

The term "new novel" is useful to indicate certain novelists' method of creation, but it is only a relative term. "New novels" have been arriving on the scene ever since the first writer wanted to express his own particular fictionalized version of reality. Mme de La Fayette wrote a "new novel;" so did Balzac, Flaubert, and every other literary pioneer. No doubt the critics of those times displayed an equal dismay at first reading of those new authors. No doubt they exclaimed, "This is not true to life!" Furthermore, if the present "new novel" finds a lasting place in literature it will some day no longer be such, but will rather be a trend and style of bygone days. Robbe-Grillet has remarked in his

essay, "A quoi servent les théories?":[4]

> . . . le roman depuis qu'il existe a toujours été nouveau. Comment l'écriture romanesque aurait-elle pu demeurer immobile, figée, lorsque tout évoluait autour d'elle -- assez vite même -- au cours des cent cinquante dernières années? Flaubert écrivait le nouveau roman de 1860, Proust le nouveau roman de 1910.

To say that a novel is fiction is to say that it is not true. That is the meaning of the word "fiction." But this does not mean that the novel cannot depict reality. The novelist invents according to his particular view of what reality is, and for each writer it is different. If it were not, he would not be inventing, but copying. To discuss the nature of reality is the prerogative of the philosopher; to interpret it is the concern of the novelist.

In his effort to invent the world which he puts into his novel, every writer draws upon the past. The new novel, although it is written in a new way, did not spring into being from nowhere. Its ancestors are easily traced: Kafka, Joyce, Faulkner, Proust, Henry James, Sartre, Camus. Yet the new novel takes a new look at reality.

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[4]Alain Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), pp. 10-11.

CHAPTER III

ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET

One of the most eloquent defenders of the new novel is a man who has written five novels, a collection of short stories, a collection of essays, and two ciné-romans: Alain Robbe-Grillet. The son of an engineer, he was born at Brest in 1922. He studied at the Lycée Buffon and Saint-Louis at Paris, graduating from the Institut national agronomique. As an agronomist and statistician he visited many parts of the world making studies on tropical fruits: Morocco, French Guiana, Martinique, Guadaloupe. Besides writing novels, he has been involved in four films.[5] At the present time he is the literary director of a publishing house in Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, which has published most of the "new novels."

As an articulate defender of his writings and cinema productions, Robbe-Grillet insists in his collection of essays that he is not a theorist of the novel, but rather that what he is proposing are critical reflections on books he has written, has read, and intends to write,

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[5]Robbe-Grillet's four films are L'Année dernière à Marienbad (1961), L'Immortelle (1963), Trans-Europ-Express (1966), and L'Homme qui ment (1967).

inspired by reaction to his own books:[6]

> Je ne suis pas un théoricien du roman. J'ai seulement, comme tous les romanciers sans doute, aussi bien du passé que du présent, été amené à faire quelques reflexions critiques sur les livres que j'avais écrits, sur ceux que je lisais, sur ceux encore que je projetais d'écrire.

Speaking of the world which is our reality, he denies it any qualities except being, in his now-famous statement: "Or le monde n'est ni significant ni absurde. Il est, tout simplement."[7] For him, it is enough. Out of this phenomenological view of the world he creates with artistic technique a new world which is at the same time invention and reality. To examine Robbe-Grillet's world and the techniques he uses to convey its reality will be the purpose of this study, with particular emphasis on his latest novel published in 1965, La Maison de rendez-vous.[8] It is hoped that this examination will reveal that Robbe-Grillet has pushed the novel to new frontiers of realism, to a new reality of uncertainty.

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[6]Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman, p. 7.

[7]Ibid., p. 21.

[8]Alain Robbe-Grillet, La Maison de rendez-vous (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1965. All page numbers in parentheses in text will refer to this edition).

CHAPTER IV

SETTINGS OF ROBBE-GRILLET'S NOVELS

The settings of Robbe-Grillet's novels provide frames of unquestionable solidity and credibility. Although they are never given a name or an exact location, readers know that his first novel, Les Gommes (1953), takes place in a town on the coast of France. The location of Le Voyeur (1955) is an island off the French Atlantic coast. La Jalousie (1957) takes place on a tropical island, possibly in the West Indies. A fairly large city in northern Europe is the scene of Dans le labyrinthe (1959). His two films are also set in real places: L'Année dernière à Marienbad in Bavaria at a luxury hotel, and L'Immortelle in Istanbul.

The geographical placements of Robbe-Grillet's books and films do not deceive the reader. The town in Les Gommes is real, as is the banana plantation of La Jalousie, the island in Le Voyeur, the city of Dans le labyrinthe. Each setting is a solid frame around the looking glass through which, like Alice, the reader steps, to find himself out of his familiar world. The frame is real, the looking glass deceptive. Before he steps back through it on the last page, the reader will have had a journey through a new experience.

La Maison de rendez-vous takes place in Hong Kong: "Tout le monde connaît Hong-Kong, sa rade, ses jonques, ses sampans, les buildings de Kowloon, . . ." (p. 11). In a few words the author has given the reader a tourist-eye view of Hong Kong by naming the features which come most readily to mind in thinking of Hong Kong, or which would first greet the eye of a new arrival. Robbe-Grillet mentions real place names: the New Territories, Kowloon, Macao, Aberdeen. His city streets lead to entirely plausible places: an elegant villa where Lady Ava entertains a select clientele; an air-conditioned apartment house; a middle-class English hotel, the Victoria; the ferry boat which carries automobiles and people between Kowloon and Victoria. The streets themselves, whether in the elegant section of Kowloon or in the crowded tenement neighborhoods of Hong Kong, are real. People walk dogs, dance, drink, gossip, watch a play, run errands, ride in taxis and rickshaws. The intrigue involves all the elements of a standard Oriental mystery: death by murder, suicide or accident, traffic in drugs and prostitution, even Communist agents from Red China. At this point all resemblance of La Maison de rendez-vous to a standard thriller ends.

CHAPTER V

TRAITS OF THE NEW NOVEL

In seeking to identify the techniques used by Robbe-Grillet to express the new concept and the particular philosophical attitude of the new novel, one critic has drawn a list of traits to look for: (1) substitution of pattern for plot; (2) prominence of objects; (3) disregard of exterior chronology; (4) unorthodox treatment of dialogue; and (5) new approach to characters.[9]

In the new concept of the novel, the reader will arrive at the last page of La Maison de rendez-vous with no solution to the mystery. When he steps back through the looking glass into his own everyday world, he looks back on a series of experiences which have been created in his consciousness, and at the moment of their creation, have been destroyed. These experiences have no past, no future, and above all, no explanation. The reader ends the book in a state of uncertainty for which he finds no remedy. His act of reading resembles a walk through someone else's consciousness. His stroll has lasted the length of time he has spent in reading the book, a span of

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[9]Laurent Le Sage, The French New Novel: An Introduction and a Sampler (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962), p. 5.

several hours which approximates the time which seems to go by in the book. The writer has, by art and technique, given the reader what seems a candid report of the writer's process in thinking out a story. Scene after scene passes through the reader's mind, just as it is apparently passing through the author's mind at the same time. The reader participates in the act of creation by the act of reading. This creative act requires of the reader not passive acceptance, but active collaboration, a process into which the reader must enter if the writer is to succeed in his aim. Robbe-Grillet expresses his attitude toward his reader:[10]

> . . . l'auteur aujourd'hui proclame l'absolu besoin qu'il a de son concours, un concours actif, conscient, <u>créateur</u>. Ce qu'il lui demande, ce n'est plus de <u>recevoir</u> tout fait un monde achevé, plein, clos sur lui-même, c'est au contraire de participer à une création . . .

This kind of reading requires effort on the part of the reader. A first superficial reading of any book by Robbe-Grillet brings on little but confusion in the reader's mind. He is continually trying to orient himself and continually failing until he can accept the manner of the story's unfolding. The narrative which he expects to find in a novel he finds briefly, for a few pages or a few paragraphs, then without apparent warning, the scene

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[10]Robbe-Grillet, <u>Pour un nouveau roman</u>, p. 169.

shifts again and again. Scenes repeat themselves, but never in quite the same way. The irresistible urge he may feel to skip the descriptions and turn to the end will not help the reader: ". . . lorsque ce même lecteur passe les descriptions dans nos livres, il risque fort de se retrouver ayant tourné les pages l'une après l'autre d'un index rapide, à la fin du volume dont le contenu lui aurait entièrement échappé . . ."[11] For now the descriptions are no longer an element of the novel; they are the novel. A reader conditioned by Kafka, Faulkner, and Joyce will quickly realize that he must not only read all the book, he must also ponder it and even reread it before he reaches the point of participation. Only then can he share in the invention as if he were the creator.

He finds, for his effort, both the tedium and the stimulation of sharing in a creative process. The composer searching for the right notes, the painter struggling to fix his vision on canvas is often disappointed and dismayed by the problems of his work. At times it bores him. But he also has times of elation and joy when the work goes well. Robbe-Grillet gives his reader an exact duplicate of his own mental processes as he might use them in the invention of a story. He shows

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[11] Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman, p. 159.

him images put into language by a strictly controlled technique which conveys, by its manner of presentation, a definite philosophy.[12] He expresses the same uncertainty of reality which the reader finds in his own daily life, now concentrated on a single target.

Robbe-Grillet finds justification for his multiple uncertainties in today's world. If literature should reflect its time, modern literature then should reflect uncertainty. Sartre gave this advice to writers:[13]

> . . . Puisque nous étions <u>situés</u>, les seuls romans que nous puissions songer à écrire étaient des romans de <u>situation</u>, sans narrateurs ni témoins tout-connaissants; bref il nous fallait, si nous voulions rendre compte de notre époque, faire passer la technique romanesque de la mécanique newtonienne à la relativité généralisée, peupler nos livres de consciences à demi-lucides et à demi-obscures . . . dont aucune n'aurait sur l'événement ni sur soi de point de vue priviligée . . .; il nous fallait laisser partout des doutes, des attentes, de l'inachevé . . .

The upheavals of society in the twentieth century have made a world whose meanings, be they scientific, philosophical, religious, artistic, social or economic, remain contradictory, partial, uncertain.

Each man in his own daily life lives with uncertainty. He hears snatches of conversations; he converses

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[12] S. E. Hyman, <u>Standards: A Chronicle of Books for our own Time</u> (New York: Horizon Press, 1966), pp. 264-68.

[13] Jean-Paul Sartre, <u>Qu'est-ce que la littérature?</u> (as cited in Henri Peyre, <u>Contemporary French Literature: A Critical Anthology</u>, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964), p. 177.

with people unknown to him by name; he sees an accident, but cannot describe exactly what happened. He is prepared to deal with the uncertainties of his own life by mulling them over in his mind and coming to a conclusion. However, meeting the uncertainties of another man's mind in print disconcerts the reader until he can make the adjustment of moving into that mind. Once he has made the move, his own process of invention can begin.

Although the end effect of La Maison de rendez-vous resembles the random and discontinuous daydreaming in which everyone indulges, the careful and contrived structure of the novel belies that effect. In order to give his novel its particular kind of coherence, Robbe-Grillet must first of all exercise selectivity. The wanderings of any mind in five minutes can include an infinite number of subjects. An attempt to retrace one's own thoughts back through several seconds to see what led to what reveals how far a mind may jump in its wanderings. Robbe-Grillet seems to encourage the reader's mind to wander while at the same time he is rigidly restricting it. In spite of the dreamlike wandering from scene to scene, the play of the reader's mind is still restricted to the pertinent elements of the novel.

To the temptation to shuffle the pages of a Robbe-Grillet novel into an exterior sequence of events, the

author replies, referring to his novel La Jalousie: ". . . tout essai de reconstitution d'un chronologie extérieure aboutissait tôt ou tard à une série de contradictions, donc à une impasse."[14] Robbe-Grillet does not write a story, shuffle the pages like a pack of cards, and deal the resulting combination into a book. A restructured La Maison de rendez-vous, therefore, will not enlighten the reader. He must take the book as it comes and seek enlightenment through comprehension of the author's purpose and means.

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[14]Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman, p. 167.

CHAPTER VI

PLOTS

Probably the substitution of pattern for plot directs the novels of Robbe-Grillet most surely down a different path from the traditional novel. Yet the plot, if taken to mean the development of a situation through a series of actions by the characters, has not completely disappeared from his books. Les Gommes has a plot not unlike many detective stories. A man is apparently murdered, a special detective is sent to investigate, and twenty-four hours later the murder actually does take place. The protagonist of Le Voyeur is a watch salesman. He takes a boat to an island, displays and sells his wares there, possibly murders a little girl, and returns by boat to the mainland. A jealous husband in La Jalousie spends a long night worrying about his attractive wife who has gone into town on some errands with a neighboring planter who is a frequent visitor in their home. Dans le labyrinthe describes the wanderings of a soldier who has come to a city on the verge of occupation by enemy forces to deliver a box of articles for a dead comrade. In a sense these plots adhere rather faithfully to the classic unities of restricted place, time, and action. The action of each novel lasts a few days or less; it remains in one

place; it could logically take place in such a span of time. In this respect Robbe-Grillet's novels resemble the classic French drama of the seventeenth century which conformed, for the most part, to these same rules. Corneille's hero, notably Rodrigue,[15] had some difficulty accomplishing all he had to do within the time limit, but Robbe-Grillet's heros do not have such stupendous tasks set before them. All that Johnson, the protagonist of La Maison de rendez-vous has to do is to attend a party. Once he arrives at the party, however, things do start to happen. He becomes obsessed with a girl of the villa, tries to raise a large sum of money with which to entice her to Macao, murders one or two men, is betrayed by the girl and is arrested. Maybe he is as busy as Rodrigue after all!

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[15]Pierre Corneille, Le Cid (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967)

CHAPTER VII

DESCRIPTION

Critics have pointed out the prominence of objects over characters in Robbe-Grillet's novels, objects which the author describes minutely but with complete lack of emotion. His famous slice of tomato in Les Gommes furnishes a good example which has been quoted many times. His characters are affected with "undue visual curiosity" and seem to go around measuring things with a T-square, rule, and drawing board.[16] Chosisme is indeed a characteristic of the new novel, quite pronounced in Robbe-Grillet's books. In his essay, "Temps et description dans le récit d'aujourd'hui"[17] he attempts to explain the new position and function of objects in his writing.

Description can be used to describe people and abstractions as well as objects. The description of scenes, of people and their actions actually takes up more space in La Maison de rendez-vous than description of objects. Objects have definitely taken second place. However, Robbe-Grillet treats them in the manner of his preceding

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[16]Justin O'Brien, The French Literary Horizon (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1967), p. 327.

[17]Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman, pp. 155-69.

novels, i.e., an objective account of the appearance of an object, from a champagne glass to a salon, at a given moment. He describes precisely and vividly:

> . . . et voilà que le verre qu'il tient de l'autre main lui échappe et choit sur le sol de marbre, où il se brise en cent morceaux . . . Les éclats qui étincellent au milieu du liquide répandu, les éclaboussures projetées dans toutes les directions autour d'une flaque centrale étoilée, le pied du verre demeure presque intact et ne portant plus, à la place de la coupe, qu'un triangle de cristal recourbé, pointu comme un poignard, . . . (p. 171).

The description of objects, of course, appeared long ago in the novel. At first it served only as a prop to the action, e.g., the portrait of the Princesse de Clèves stolen by the man she loved. During the nineteenth century description took on a more important role as a way of setting a scene, fixing a mood, limning a character. Balzac used description in this way. Fixing the ambience of his characters always took up several pages: Mme Vauquer's boarding house reflected her slovenly personality; M. Grandet's house and even the street he lived on vouched for his miserly character. Things and places took on human qualities so that thing and person became interwoven. It is unthinkable to take M. Grandet out of his grim gray house and put him down at a seaside resort. As well as by his surroundings, a character drawn by Balzac and other nineteenth century novelists became well known to the reader by a personal inventory. His name, physical

appearance, family background, personality, tastes, dress, all were carefully described in order to make the reader see him clearly. He was a convincing character in a stable world.

Description in the novel, then, is not new. What has changed is its reason for being in the novel. It has taken over a large part of the book, but it is losing its traditional purpose and meaning. Once serving to set the scene and delineate character, description in Robbe-Grillet's novels becomes obsessive and repetitive, often describing time after time seemingly trivial objects. At such times the interest of the description turns on the state of mind it indicates in the viewer of the object. The centipede in La Jalousie starts out as a normal-sized centipede. By the time he makes his fifth or sixth appearance, he has grown to a monstrous size, reflecting the increasing distress in the consciousness of the man who is recalling the sight of the centipede on the wall. Description has changed from inventory to invention, and in so doing has exchanged its stability for a fluid state. The interest of the reader must turn away from the thing described to the movement of the description.

Is Robbe-Grillet playing a trick on his reader? Yes and no. Yes, because he pulls the rug out from under the stable world, and no, because he provides a new world.

Literature, the slowest of the arts to respond to change, has been sending up occasional smoke signals during the first half of this century to indicate the world is changing. Proust, Kafka, Joyce, Faulkner, to name a few, signaled the change. In other arts, innovators have been at work for some time: Picasso in painting, Boulez in music, Wright in architecture.

And the reader himself, deluged with news of every remarkable event as soon as it occurs, confronted on every side by the marvels of scientific achievement, knows his world is changing. The facts which confront him every day outdo the imagination. Science has taught him the old stable world of yesterday is changing, it will change again tomorrow, and the next day. When he turns to literature, he wants to read a reflection of that world. Otherwise, he wants facts, not fiction disguised as facts. He can no longer believe in the literary types of yesterday. He has entered a time of suspicion.[18] The new novel, avoiding the presentation of facts which the reader suspects, gives him possibilities, uncertainties, variations, ambiguities.

As in his other novels, notably La Jalousie and

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[18]Nathalie Sarraute, L'Ère du soupçon (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), p. 59.

Dans le labyrinthe, Robbe-Grillet uses these tactics in La Maison de rendez-vous. The typical narrow slit dress of the Eurasian girl is described over and over, almost every time Kim, the Eurasian girl in the book, makes her appearance: "L'étroite jupe entravée, fendue jusqu'aux cuisses . . ." (p. 11); ". . . l'étroite robe à jupe entravée fendue sur le côté jusqu'à la cuisse . . ." (p. 13); ". . . la soie blanche de la jupe est fendue latéralement, laissant deviner le creux du genou et la cuisse." (p. 15); " . . . une longue fille souple, en fourreau de soie blanche fendu sur le côté . . ." (p. 23). An Occidental looking at a Eurasian girl would no doubt first notice her unique dress. Every time he would look at her, the dress would catch his eye, just as anyone glancing at another person first notes any unusual aspect of appearance.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ROLE OF TIME

Time plays a complicated role in the novels of Robbe-Grillet. The passage of time no longer decides the course of the novel. Removed from the bonds of clock and calendar, time leaps back, leaps forward, stops, passes through the few minutes of a particular scene. In a way it has almost disappeared from the book, leaving the reader with no way of rebuilding its sequence: ". . . les recherches actuelles semblent . . . mettre en scène, le plus souvent, des structures mentales privées de «temps»."[19] Disrupted time, however, does not originate in the new novel. The flashback and the stream of consciousness techniques are familiar to the reader and the movie-goer. Michel Butor, also a new novelist, used them to form the structure of La Modification. Returns to the past and disrupted chronology as an interpolated account of events, whether or not filtered through a consciousness, date back as far as the eighteenth century with portions of Laurence Stern's Tristam Shandy.[20] Notably Henry James, Faulkner, and Proust among others made use of these devices in the

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[19] Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman, p. 164.

[20] William Rose Benét, editor, The Reader's Encyclopedia (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1948), p. 1076.

first part of the twentieth century.

Robbe-Grillet has extended these techniques to what possibly constitutes a truer reflection of a consciousness at work. Returns to the past are interwoven with projections into the future and presentations of the immediate present. Indeed, most of the scenes in La Maison de rendez-vous are happening right now. In the sense of fitting one episode to another, time does not really exist except in the fragments of each scene. The only exact time the reader is given is the arrival of Johnson (who may be the narrator) at the Villa Bleue at ten minutes past nine in the evening (p. 24). Probably by the end of the novel, time has passed to a later hour of that particular evening. Robbe-Grillet tells the reader near the beginning of the book: "Je vais donc essayer maintenant de raconter cette soirée chez Lady Ava, de préciser en tout cas quels furent, à ma connaissance, les principaux événements qui l'ont marquée" (p. 23). Because the reader is guided through the events of this particular evening by means of one borrowed consciousness, he is going to learn something about those events, but not everything. The narrator has made it clear that he is going to relate what happened, as far as he knows: "à ma connaissance." Chronological time, caught up in his consciousness, proceeds and recedes until it has very little to do with the

unfolding of events. Although what constitutes the récit seems to begin at ten minutes past nine in the evening, this indicates to the reader only the time of the narrator/protagonist's arrival at Lady Ava's soiree. Other scenes which appear and reappear may have taken place any time before, during or after the soiree. Only hints are given. The scene of Kim, the Eurasian girl, walking the dog recurs many times throughout the book, but at different, vaguely specified times of day or night:

> Le centre de la ville dégage, comme d'habitude à cette heure-ci, une odeur douce . . . Il disparaît aussitôt, et sa maîtresse à la suite, dans l'ombre d'un figuier géant (p. 23).

The shadow of a tree would probably indicate daytime.

> . . . sur le passage des servantes eurasiennes au maintien de princesses qui, à la nuit tombante, promènent imperturbablement, dans la chaleur humide et les odeurs d'égout, les grands chiens silencieux de Lady Ava (p. 33).

"A la nuit tombante" would indicate nightfall or twilight.

> . . . toujours devancée par le chien noir tirant sur sa laisse, les fines chaussures dorées qui s'éloignent le long des boutiques aux commerces suspects, le balai de riz, qui, achevant sa trajectoire courbe, pousse la couverture illustrée du magazine jusqu'au caniveau, dont l'eau boueuse entraîne l'image de couleur en tournoyant dans le soleil (p. 38).

Daytime is indicated here by "dans le soleil." This scene continues: "La rue, à cette heure-ci de la journée, est presque déserte." In tropical countries the streets are likely to be deserted in the early afternoon, siesta time.

> Et maintenant elle marche dans la nuit le long des

grands immeubles neufs de Kowloon . . . (p. 50)
. . . . . .
C'est la dernière personne que j'aie aperçue, cette nuit-là, en rentrant de la Villa Bleue (p. 52).

This description places the scene of the girl walking the dog probably late at night.

Time within each scene covers only a few minutes, roughly the amount of time it might take a reader to read the scene. The narrator climbs the front steps of the Villa Bleue at the same time that a group of three people are climbing them, having come from the entrance to the garden around the villa. As the narrator climbs the steps he notes that the three people are two men and a woman. He identifies one of the men as Johnson. Then he reflects that this man is not Johnson, but must be Lauren's fiancé who has just been dismissed by his business partner, Johnson. The description of what may be going on in the fiancé's mind at this moment is expressed in a sentence of sixty or seventy words, and reading it takes about enough time for the narrator to have climbed the stairs (p. 58). He enters the grand salon, and sees Lady Ava surrounded by new arrivals who are greeting her. She sees the narrator, abruptly leaves the circle of guests, comes to him and draws him aside to tell him of Édouard Manneret's death. Again, this action would be accomplished in about the same time as it takes to read it (p. 59). Thinking of the whole story as it unfolds during that evening, it probably

requires about the same amount of time to happen as it requires for the reader to read it.

Some scenes in La Maison de rendez-vous take no time at all. They are moments frozen in time, snapshots, instantanés of arrested action. The hand of the red-faced man, for example, reaches for the glass of champagne offered to him on a tray by the waiter. The waiter in turn is looking at something on the floor. With his attention elsewhere, the tray he is holding is tipping dangerously. The reader holds this scene of frozen action before him while the red-faced man carries on his conversation with his companion, a conversation which touches on characters and events of the book. Two pages later, the action is released, and the reader (as narrator) sees the waiter rebalance the tray, the red-faced man take his glass of champagne, the waiter set the tray on the buffet table, drop to his hands and knees to pick up the object he was looking at, put it on the table by the tray, end of scene (pp. 18-21). The time required for the action to take place would be about the same as the time required to read about it.

Chronology inside a mind has no beginning and no ending. It does not unroll by the rules of the clock, but tends to revolve. A thought can break off exactly where it began, and one says he is "thinking in circles." A mind

can return to the same event, be it in the past or in the future, and even to a certain moment of that event, time after time.

The wanderings of a mind to and fro, round and round, obviously resemble the wandering path of a labyrinth, an evocation found in Robbe-Grillet's novels and films. Time and space are inextricably mingled in the labyrinth. If one enters, he goes through space and time, both of which bring him back to his starting point. In Les Gommes, a murder which starts at thirty minutes past seven in the evening is accomplished in the same place at the same time the following evening. The protagonist of Le Voyeur comes to the island, debarks at the dock, circles the island, embarks at the same dock while his thoughts have been revolving around an event in which he is probably involved. The jealous husband's chaotic thoughts in La Jalousie circle around his wife and her possible adultery. The labyrinth of time in Dans le labyrinthe which the narrator's reverie describes coincides with the labyrinth of the city through which the soldier wanders. The concept of labyrinthine time and space in La Maison de rendez-vous will be considered in more detail in the discussion of structure in a later chapter.

In the interpretation of the role of time in his film, L'Année dernière à Marienbad, Robbe-Grillet commented

that the question most frequently asked about the film concerned "last year." Did this man and this woman really meet last year? Did she really remember, but pretend not to? Had she really forgotten "last year?" They seem like natural questions which might come up in a discussion of the film, but Robbe-Grillet dismisses them all as having no meaning. He then explains why the questions have no answers:[21]

> L'univers dans lequel se déroule tout le film est, de façon caractéristique, celui d'un présent perpétuel qui rend impossible tout recours à la memoire. C'est un monde sans passé qui se suffit à lui-même à chaque instant et qui s'efface au fur et à mesure.

Likewise the questions which would naturally arise from reading La Maison de rendez-vous could not be answered: did Johnson murder Manneret? Was Johnson the victim of a plot to draw him into the service of the Communists? Was Lauren a victim too, or a participant in the plot? Was there a plot? The reader cannot know. All he can do is to reread the book, or in the case of the film, ". . . en remettant les bobines du film dans l'appareil à projections."[22]

It is the quality of "nowness" which deprives the characters of the book of a past or a future. The reader

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[21] Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman, p. 165.

[22] Ibid., p. 167.

can never know more than the creating consciousness knows, which is never total knowledge, about the characters and events of the novel. The duration of the book does not represent a condensation of a longer duration of the "real" story. During a recall from the past or a projection of the future by a consciousness, clock time is also flowing along. The role of clock time in La Maison de rendez-vous is represented by the act of reading, during which time the reader experiences the circular interior time of the narrator/author. Therefore, clock time plays its role by marking the duration of the story, which lasts exactly as long as it takes the reader to read it. Exterior time, representing the duration of reading, joins interior time, representing the duration of creating, and together, by active collaboration, they invent a work.

CHAPTER IX

DIALOGUE

Unorthodox treatment of dialogue has been listed by Le Sage as one of the characteristics of the new novel. This particular feature is possibly more striking in the work of other new novelists. Nathalie Sarraute, for example, uses tropismes, her word for the uncontrolled ruminations of pre-speech, instead of conversation.[23]

Robbe-Grillet uses dialogue sparingly in La Maison de rendez-vous. The first dialogue quoted does not occur until page twenty-five, where a girl in the garden of the Villa Bleue, possibly Lauren, cries, "Jamais! Jamais! Jamais!" This situation continues and expands slightly into a portion of a representation on the stage in the Villa Bleue, a spectacle which Lady Ava is putting on for her guests at the soiree. Now Lauren and Johnson exchange some lines which seem to be part of the play.

Most of the snatches of conversation are reported from the salon of the Villa Bleue, which is the central setting of the book, and from which all other scenes evolve. Conversation between Johnson and the red-faced man sometimes occurs as dialogue and sometimes as

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[23]Sarraute, L'Ère du soupçon, pp. 96-97.

paraphrase. As this is a key scene, Robbe-Grillet reverts to it more than to any other scene. In all but three of the scenes of the two men talking, the author uses paraphrase to indicate the subject of conversation. The conversation is actually a monologue by the red-faced man, as his companion listens, grows restless and bored, but never contributes a remark or responds to what the red-faced man is saying. The first quoted dialogue of this scene occurs in the fifth appearance of the scene in the book, on page twenty-nine, one sentence only, which seems to refer to and to sum up the subject of the red-faced man's conversation: "Si vous n'avez pas vu cela, vous n'avez rien vu." The longest quoted dialogue of this scene appears in the seventh repetition on page forty-five and forty-six. He is explaining to his companion this time about the elaborate houses of pleasure to be found in the Orient. In his last quoted sentence he remarks: "Ça, c'était un personnage!" referring to the death of Édouard Manneret. In the many repetitions of this scene which follow, the red-faced man is directly quoted only one more time, on page eighty-nine, when he says, "Oh, merci!" to the waiter.

The longest quoted conversation takes place between Johnson and the police on pages ninety-one to ninety-seven. Johnson has been frantically searching for someone

from whom he can borrow a large sum of money with which he hopes to entice Lauren to accompany him to Macao. Johnson has already met with several refusals when he arrives at a little shop with the word "Change" on a sign in seven languages. He can arouse no one, but sees a Chinese sitting nearby. In his frenzy to get information, he tries to shake it out of the old Chinese, causing the old man to start screaming at the top of his voice. When the police catch up with Johnson, he believes they are the same three policemen who had interrupted the party at the Villa Bleue earlier that evening (pp. 88-90). Seven pages of dialogue follow between the police lieutenant and Johnson. This dialogue occurs about half-way through the novel, and appears to serve several purposes. It is a refreshing change of pace from the rather formidable paragraphs which have preceded it. It sums up the conflicting information so far gathered by the reader about Johnson. It foreshadows the probable end of the story when Johnson will be arrested for the murder of Édouard Manneret and possibly of Georges Marchand.

A few other dialogues extend over more than one page. Lauren and Johnson discuss his invitation to her to accompany him to Macao (pp. 84-87). Johnson engages a taxi driver whom he suspects of being a spy and chats with him (pp. 111-13). Johnson and Manneret carry on a

heated but disjointed argument over Johnson's search for money to borrow (pp. 114-16). Johnson and Lady Ava talk after the party over a glass of champagne about Lauren, the Eurasian girl Kim and her twin, and the death of Manneret (pp. 137-39). Kim talks with M. Tchang, trying to establish his identity as a business associate of Lady Ava, with no success (pp. 150-53).

All of the conversations listed above except the last one include Johnson. Johnson is either one of the participants in all quoted conversations, or as the narrator could have overheard the conversations. The only exceptions to this condition are two conversations involving Kim, the Eurasian girl; one with M. Tchang already noted, the other with Édouard Manneret (p. 181). The narrator, however, whether he is Johnson or not, is free to speculate on conversations which he imagines. He has had to use his imagination anyway to describe scenes where he could not have been present. This would include any scene of Kim performing errands for Lady Ava, as in the scene of her conversation with M. Tchang, or any of the scenes where Kim is in Manneret's apartment.

The brief exchanges which make up most of the dialogue in La Maison de rendez-vous produce an eerie effect. This is not due to vocabulary, which is quite banal: "Très bien. Ce sera comme vous voudrez." (p. 53).

"Maintenant vous allez danser encore une fois avec lui." (p. 30); "Vous prendrez bien une coupe de champagne." (p. 68). These short commonplace sentences might be overheard at any party, and would not seem unusual to the one who heard them. These same phrases, however, set down in a book almost without warning or explanation, "produce an unreal, eerie quality like that of familiar objects in a surrealistic setting, suggestive of mysterious meanings and much left unsaid."[24] The reader feels instinctively in La Maison de rendez-vous that much is left unsaid. He never knows exactly the topic of conversation in such phrases as "Ce sera comme vous voudrez." Some lines, of course, could hardly contain a hidden meaning. It is doubtful if "Vous prendrez bien une coupe de champagne" is anything but the invitation of a gracious hostess to her guest.

Slight variations of the same conversation occur in the scenes of the garden, which are fused into the scenes on the stage in the theater of the Villa Bleue. The narrator first hears "Jamais! Jamais! Jamais!" in the garden (p. 25) in a woman's voice which is probably Lauren's. The next time this scene appears, it seems to occur again in the garden. Lauren, now identified by the

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[24]Le Sage, The French New Novel, p. 39.

narrator, is pleading with Johnson not to leave her. He leaves the stage, the curtain falls on the first act. One page farther, the same scene is again on the stage, using the same dialogue. Now the scene reverts to the garden, and becomes the scene of the suicide of Lauren's fiancé. The repetition of a scene using the same dialogue but with a different speaker and a different meaning given to the words increases the dreamlike and uncertain quality of the dialogue.

On the other hand, the long conversation between Johnson and the police lieutenant on the streets of Victoria is a matter-of-fact word for word report of what the two men said to each other. A policeman is making a routine questioning of a suspect. In that respect, the conversation might have come from almost any detective novel. But again the reader finds himself still in Wonderland. The conversation has been reported in the third person by an omniscent narrator who seems to know exactly what is going through Johnson's mind. At the very end of the conversation the narrative switches from third person to first person, and the narrator, now "I," explains: "Je passe aussi sur le bruit des insectes," (p. 97). Switching at that point back to the Villa Bleue, the narrative continues in first person.

Dialogue presents a problem to the new novelist.

He wishes to seem to disappear from his work. Of all aspects of the novel, dialogue is probably the most difficult to purge of the author's manipulations. He must identify the speakers in some manner, but the traditional method of "he said," "she replied," "he added," puts the author definitely in the scene, controlling the characters like marionettes. Robbe-Grillet has taken himself out of La Maison de rendez-vous about as much as he can, and has given the narrator the job of holding the strings, either in first or third person. He uses only the verb dire to indicate speakers, thus neutralizing as much as possible the author's intrusion.

Robbe-Grillet does not use dialogue in the traditional way to advance action or to delineate character. The dialogue of La Maison de rendez-vous for the most part deepens the mystery because it does not really divulge what is going on. The true meanings lie in the sous-conversation to which the reader has no access. Robbe-Grillet uses paraphrase to a much greater degree than dialogue, thus turning dialogue into description. This in turn heightens the effect of interior monologue, and diminishes the manipulating author. Paraphrase also serves to reinforce the reality of the scene in which conversations occur. Contrary to a film where spoken dialogue adds the quality of sound to sight, a novel can

only enter the reader's consciousness by his act of seeing. Reading dialogue is one step farther removed from reality than hearing it, and raises a small barrier between reader and page. The reader makes an unconscious effort to "hear" the dialogue he is reading. Robbe-Grillet, by his frugal use of dialogue, reinforces the reality of the novel.

CHAPTER X

CHARACTERS

Spirited battles have raged over the trait of the new novel listed by Le Sage as "a new approach to characters." Critics have mourned the lack of information given to the reader, particularly information available to the narrator or protagonist: "Exclusive use of what the narrator feels and sees denies the reader basic information which the narrator himself already possesses... Why make the reader guess?"[25]

But the vigorous defense of the new novel's personnage by both Sarraute and Robbe-Grillet seems to indicate that the fully described character has vanished along with the type he created in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, nothing can restore him to his former firm place in the heart of the reader:[26]

> Et, selon toute apparence, non seulement le romancier ne croit plus guère à ses personnages, mais le lecteur, de son côté, n'arrive plus à y croire. Aussi voit-on le personnage du roman, privé de ce double soutien, la foi en lui du romancier et du lecteur, qui le faisait tenir debout, solidement d'aplomb, portant sur ses larges épaules tout le poids de l'histoire, vaciller et se défaire.

Robbe-Grillet ties the disappearance of the

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[25]Le Sage, The French New Novel, p. 17.

[26]Sarraute, L'Ère du soupçon, pp. 56-57.

personnage to the disappearance of his world, the world of the individual. Contemporary man is identified by number. Robbe-Grillet points out that this may not be progress, but it is a fact: "Peut-être n'est-ce pas un progrès, mais il est certain que l'époque actuelle est plutôt celle du numéro matricule."[27]

Again, as with other traits discussed, the new approach to character has its antecedents in the initialed characters of Kafka, and in the multiple names or one name for two characters in Faulkner. Although he may never become a type, the protagonist of Robbe-Grillet's first published novel, Les Gommes, has a name, and the reader learns some facts about him. Much of that information, of course, is speculative. The reader never finds out positively that Professor Dupont is Wallas' father and the clerk in the stationery store his stepmother. The height of annonymity is reached with a protagonist who never shows up at all, the tormented husband of La Jalousie. Robbe-Grillet's characters do not remain a complete enigma to the reader, however. One discerning critic found many keys to character in La Jalousie by analysis of actions.[28]

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[27]Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman, p. 33.

[28]Dominique Penot, "Psychology of the Characters in Robbe-Grillet's La Jalousie," Books Abroad, XL, 1 (Winter, 1966), 5-15.

By this same method the reader can learn, or at least speculate, on the characters in La Maison de rendez-vous. In spite of ambiguous and often unsavory information about him, the protagonist, Ralph Johnson, is an attractive man. He is also known as Sir Ralph, L'Américain, and R. Jonestone. Sometimes he is Ralph Johnson, the American, who is familiarly called "Sir Ralph" (p. 53). Sometimes he is the English baron who is familiarly called "Johnson" or even "the American" (p. 46). When his name appears as a sculptor (p. 57) or painter (p. 185) he is R. Jonestone. Most of the time he is referred to as Johnson. His nationality comes into question during his interrogation by the police, who are disinclined to believe that a "Johnson" could carry a Portuguese passport: " 'Ralph Johnson, c'est un drôle de nom pour un Portugais de Macao . . .' " (p. 95). Johnson seems to be an entrepreneur. He owns established businesses at Macao and Canton, and is on the verge of expanding, or perhaps has already expanded his markets to Chinese quarters all over the world: " . . . de l'océan Indien jusqu'à San Francisco . . ." (p. 166), selling all kinds of love potions, remedies, poisons, aphrodisiacs. He has come to Hong Kong to make contact with a man who can help him develop a new preparation which he hopes will outsell Tiger Balm, the most popular patent medicine in

the Orient. Johnson feels that his new product will enrich him far beyond his present financial status. Sometimes he is unscrupulous in his business dealings. He has apparently involved one of his partners, a young Dutchman of good family, in a disreputable enterprise and then dismissed him. This upsets the young man, but not Johnson.

Apparently Johnson has visited Hong Kong many times and has used the services offered by the Villa Bleue, elegant house of pleasure. At any rate, he is a close friend of Lady Ava, presiding hostess of the villa. He has received an invitation from her for a soiree at the Villa Bleue, with cocktails and dancing. He is even one of the inner circle of Lady Ava's friends, those whose invitations bear a hand written note: "représentation théâtrale à onze heures" (p. 164). Since Lady Ava's clientele includes men from the highest circles of society, Johnson must have enough savoir-faire to make him feel at ease in those circles. Although he is never described completely, the image of Clark Gable arises, at least in the mind of the middle-aged American movie goer. He is both insolent and submissive to Lauren, with whom he has fallen desperately in love. His manner toward her is cold: ". . . un demi-sourire presque méprisant, ironique en tout cas, tandis qu'il s'incline avec raideur

devant la jeune femme -- on dirait par dérision -- . . ." (pp. 46-47). Yet when she proposes an exorbitant price to accompany him to Macao, he rushes out in the middle of the night in a fruitless effort to raise the money.

Feeling completely at ease in high society, he does not feel the need to conform. This evening he is the only man there in a dark dinner jacket. Sometimes he betrays little human feelings which everyone knows. Upon his arrival at the Villa Bleue he finds he is a little early, and turns off into the gardens to avoid being the first guest to arrive at the party: "Comme j'avais l'impression d'être un peu en avance, . . . j'ai préféré ne pas entrer tout de suite et j'ai obliqué vers la gauche . . ." (p. 24).

He is sensitive to other people. In the garden he sees a man seated on a bench. At this point the narrator has taken over and the man he sees is Johnson. The man seems lost in thought, so he passes by without disturbing him (p. 57). His attitude toward Lady Ava is thoughtful and courteous. He kisses her hand as he takes leave of her (p. 21). He stays to applaud her act when the others have left, and to keep her company when she wants someone to talk and drink champagne with her (p. 138). He listens patiently by her bedside when she is reliving her past (p. 208). With other people he is also courteous.

He even puts up with the interminable ramblings of the red-faced man (p. 17). Johnson also speaks at least three languages: English, Mandarin, Cantonese, and possibly Portuguese, since he lives in Macao. He is tall: ". . . une haute silhouette en smoking sombre . . ." (p. 13). The portrait emerges of an adventurer, not married but having a way with women, sensitive yet a hard-headed businessman, successful in most of his dealings but outsmarted by a woman, capable of both tender consideration and sudden violence. Even though the author forbids speculation, can the reader help hoping that Johnson finds a way out of his difficulties?

La Maison de rendez-vous is more thickly populated than any of Robbe-Grillet's books since Les Gommes. Supporting characters are not as fully outlined as Johnson, but it is possible to see Lauren as a former "nice" girl, cultivated and beautiful, embittered by the death of her fiancé and planning revenge on the man responsible for it; Lady Ava as the proprietress of the Villa Bleue, her fading beauty carefully supplemented by elaborate makeup, lonely and growing old, involved (or trapped) in a clandestine drug enterprise; Édouard Manneret as the mystery man, immensely rich, sitting at his desk like a spider spinning his webs of intrigue; inscrutable Kim, the beautiful Eurasian servant girl who is possibly

Manneret's daughter but also the victim of his drug experiments; Georges as Lauren's fiancé, a young man of good family from Holland, completely overwhelmed by his misfortune.

Robbe-Grillet particularly describes Lauren and Kim, not once but many times in the course of the story. He evokes the sensuous image of Lauren by precise, poetic descriptions:

> Je préfère qu'elle ait les épaules nues, et aussi, quand elle se retourne, la naissance de la gorge. Sa chair polie luit d'un éclat doux, sous la lumière des lustres (p. 12).

> . . . une fille que je vois aujourd'hui pour la première fois, qui a de beaux cheveux d'un blond doré, une bouche agréable et une chair satinée, largement offerte aux regards par le décolleté d'une robe laissant les épaules nues, ainsi que le dos et la naissance de la gorge (p. 62).

The narrator is also fascinated by the nape of her neck. One of the many frozen gestures described over and over in the book is that of Lauren bending over to fasten the strap on her golden sandal, in which posture her head is bent, golden curls falling to the side and the nape with its soft down exposed:

> Dans l'attention que Lauren porte à cette opération délicate, la chevelure blonde renversée se déplace et découvre davantage la nuque qui se courbe et la chair fragile, au duvet plus pâle encore que la chevelure blonde, . . . (p. 82).

The descriptions of Kim are equally sensuous:

> . . . fourreau de soie noire à petit col droit et sans

> manches, coupé net au ras des aisselles et au cou. La mince étoffe brillante est portée à même la peau, épousant les formes du ventre, de la poitrine, des hanches, et se plissant à la taille en un faisceau de menus sillons . . . (p. 13).

> Un peu plus haut, la soie blanche de la jupe est fendue latéralement, laissant deviner le creux du genou et la cuisse. Au-dessus, grâce à un discret système à glissière, presque indiscernable, la robe doit s'ouvrir entièrement jusqu'à l'aisselle d'un seul coup, sur la chair nue (p. 15).

The reader finds Kim most often in a scene of walking Lady Ava's black dog. While the scene indicates some movement, reading the scene gives the effect of frozen action:

> Mais un peu plus loin, dans une avenue déserte, une longue fille souple, en fourreau de soie blanche, fendu sur le côté, passe dans la clarté bleuâtre d'un lampadaire. Elle tient en laisse, à bout de bras, un très grand chien noir au pelage luisant qui marche, raide, devant elle. Il disparaît aussitôt, et sa maîtresse à la suite, dans l'ombre d'un figuier géant (p. 23).

A list of characters would be incomplete without mention of Lady Ava's dogs. It is not unusual for a lonely, aging woman to become overattached to pets. Her dogs are big, black, and shiny. Their mistress loves them devotedly and sees that they receive regular exercise. The servant girls who exercise them have strict instructions not to allow them to enter air-conditioned buildings. This presents a problem for Kim when she is running errands such as picking up drugs or girls for Lady Ava, or paying visits to Manneret. She cannot take the dog upstairs with her into the air-conditioning, yet she must

be sure to leave him in a secure spot while she makes her visit. The black dog she exercises is devoted to her as well, and will come charging up the stairs if he senses that she is in danger.

Curiously enough, the most complete description of Lady Ava's dogs is not of the living dog, but of a dog model in a shop window. Robbe-Grillet carefully distinguishes the false dog from the real: " . . . son immobilité totale, sa raideur un peu trop accentuée, ses yeux de verre trop brillants sans doute, et trop fixes, l'intérieur peut-être trop rose de sa gueule entrouverte, ses dents trop blanches . . ." (p. 14). The dog is artificial, not real, and only one of the many devices by which Robbe-Grillet constantly reminds the reader that he is reading fiction, not fact.

CHAPTER XI

VIEWPOINT

All paths of investigation into the work of Robbe-Grillet must finally turn to form, for as Bruce Morrissette recently noted, this is a fundamental tenet of Robbe-Grillet.[29] In accordance with another tenet of Robbe-Grillet, that a piece of literature should stand alone like any other work of art, the reader who seeks meaning beyond the work may find only impasse. Within the work itself, however, a study of its structure can help the reader certainly to understand the author's intent, and possibly, as Robbe-Grillet has suggested, to share an invention, thus learning to contrive his own world and his own life.[30]

All of Robbe-Grillet's novels and films share many characteristics, yet each is a distinct work with its own flavor, subtle but permeating the whole work. La Maison de rendez-vous is obviously a story seen through Occidental eyes, even tourist Occidental eyes. On the third page of the text (p. 13) the reader sees Hong Kong: ". . . sa

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[29]Bruce Morrissette, Alain Robbe-Grillet (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 5.

[30]Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman, p. 169.

rade, ses jonques, ses sampans, les buildings de Kowloon . . ." about what a tourist arriving by boat or plane would first notice. The next object to catch his attention is the narrow slit dress of the Hong Kong girls, again something which every tourist would immediately notice.

Robbe-Grillet's descriptions of his European characters give the reader at least a glimpse of personality, emotion, or individuality. Not so with the Oriental characters. Kim's expression is always "impersonnel et vide" (p. 105). She disappears "comme un fantôme" (p. 106). Her features are "lisses et indéchiffrables" (p. 102). She stands in attendance on Lady Ava, her body rigid and her wax-like face fixed in the impassive half-smile seen in the Far East. She looks without blinking toward her mistress. As always, she is both attentive and absent, perhaps with somber thoughts behind her wide-open eyes, ready for the least sign from Lady Ava (p. 69).

Other scattered remarks indicate the Occidental eye: Kim's twin sister may have the same name, but pronounced with a slight difference discernible only to the Chinese ear; Johnson in the taxi wonders if his driver is the same one he had hired to take him to the hotel, but decides that all Chinese look alike. M. Tchang, the

broker, wears a half-smile which is probably only a matter of politeness.

CHAPTER XII

COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

Dualities and pairings contain both similarities and contrasts. All of the women characters are attached to the Villa Bleue, so they all share the same profession. Lady Ava and Lauren are both European, but Ava is old and fading, Lauren young and beautiful. Lauren and Kim are both young, but Lauren is European, blond, dressed in a white décolleté evening gown with a full skirt. Kim is a Eurasian, brunette, dressed in traditional Hong Kong style. Both are pictured standing up, Lauren in the garden or dancing, Kim walking the dog or standing near Lady Ava. Kim is often pictured lying on a divan in a provocative pose. Lauren assumes this pose only twice, both times on the poster bed in her chamber at the Villa Bleue: ". . . conservant depuis le début de la scène la pose exacte de la Maïa, qui est un tableau célèbre de Manneret et la déesse de l'illusion" (p. 85). Maja is the Hindu goddess of illusion. La Maja desnuda is a famous painting by the Spanish painter Goya of his mistress, and one of the most beautiful nudes ever painted. Both Kim and Lauren wear the same style of golden slippers with high heels and straps that cross the instep and circle the ankle. Description of Lauren always focuses on her bust

and head, of Kim on her legs, both natural targets of male glances.

The men characters also pair off with contrasts and similarities. Johnson, Manneret and Marchand are all European. Marchand is young, Johnson probably middle-aged, and Manneret is in his sixties. Johnson and Manneret may be doing business together with a new drug, or Manneret may be hatching a plot to involve Johnson in a Communist spy ring. Manneret is wealthy, Johnson is working at it. They seem to share depraved tastes, with Manneret possibly a little more inclined to grisly activities. Marchand and Johnson are partners in a business enterprise. Marchand is upright, Johnson is unscrupulous. Marchand is Lauren's fiancé, Johnson is or is about to become her lover. Johnson is often caught in the eye of the narrator in the company of a garrulous, fat, short, red-faced man, who contrasts sharply with tall, elegant, debonair Johnson.

Robbe-Grillet has other ways of introducing similarity and contrast. Kim in a black dress walking the dog pauses in front of a shop window and sees either her image reflected in the glass, or probably a duplicate of herself in a wax mannequin, identical in every detail of posture and including the dog, but the mannequin is wearing a white dress (pp. 14-15). The wax mannequin also

ties in with the description of Kim's wax-like face and rigid posture. Kim has a shadowy twin, whose name may be the same, or may be Lucky. Sometimes she is dressed in white. Except for the coolies in blue, all clothing is either black or white for both men and women. The device of the shattered glass, a prominent scene in Robbe-Grillet's first film, L'Année dernière à Marienbad, occurs twice with varied repetitions. A champagne glass is dropped and shatters on the marble floor at the Villa Bleue. A glass of sherry breaks in a hundred pieces on the marble floor of Manneret's luxurious apartment.

CHAPTER XIII

THEMES

The first paragraph cues in the main themes of the book. In fact, the first sentence states a dominant theme: "La chair des femmes a toujours occupé, sans doute, une grande place dans mes rêves." (p. 11). The narrator obsessively notices Lauren's glowing skin, particularly the nape with its soft down, obsessively speculates on Kim's flesh hidden by the narrow slit skirt, lingers appreciatively on Kito's body (the little Japanese prostitute newly arrived at the Villa Bleue), revealed during a spectacle as the black dog removes her clothing bit by bit (pp. 41-45). The narrator is talking of his dreams: "dans mes rêves," and the reader is going to find visions, illusions, contradictions and the kind of situations which occur in dreams. Even when the narrator is awake: "Même à l'état de veille . . ." (p. 11) he sees objects which bring back memories or evoke visions. He sees a girl bent over to fasten a sandal, and he sees her "soumise à quelque complaisance." This in turn makes him think of the narrow slit dress of Hong Kong girls which "se déchire d'un coup sous une main violente." Other objects set him to daydreaming: a leather whip in a Parisian shop window, a play poster, an advertisement for garters or perfume,

moist open lips, an iron bracelet, a dog collar, a poster bed, a piece of cord, the burning end of a cigar. Lauren and Ava will both appear in a poster bed. Kim will walk a dog on a leash attached to its collar. A spectacle will be performed in the theater at the Villa Bleue. The suggestion of torture, evoked by the whip, the iron bracelet and the piece of cord, comes up in the red-faced man's conversations and in the mysterious activities of Manneret. These visions and fantasies could arise out of the burning end of a cigar smoked in the night on shipboard, or it could also suggest torture. The murdered girl in Le Voyeur was tortured with burning cigarettes.

More foreshadowings follow: "Dans les jardins, j'organise des fêtes" will be the soiree; "Pour les temples je règle des cérémonies" will be the play; "j'ordonne des sacrifices" will be the tortures. On his journey, which suggests the theme revolving around the red-faced man, the narrator sees erotic sculptures of Byzantium, hears cries in the palaces of the moguls and the Arabs. He sees iron rings embedded in the stone of an old Roman prison, which conjures up for him a beautiful slave girl chained for torture. These sado-erotic themes will appear in the course of the story as conjectures, as tales told by a traveler, or as the obsessions of Manneret. Thus the first paragraph

presages in a capsule all that follows. Such words as rêves, images, décor hint of the form of the story in scenes and visions and also tell the reader this is make-believe.

CHAPTER XIV

CONTRADICTIONS

If a story is make-believe, it can be contradictory. Contradictions abound in La Maison de rendez-vous. Two notices before the beginning of the book make opposing statements. The first one states that the story can in no way be considered a documentary on life in Hong Kong. The second one assures the reader that such places do exist. At one point the whole story is completely denied by a spy who claims that Johnson never left his hotel that night (p. 163). Manneret dies at least six ways: suicide, accident, murdered by Kim, a blackmailer, or Johnson, or killed by Lady Ava's dog. Marchand dies in two ways: suicide in the garden of the Villa Bleue, or at the wheel of his car on the ferry boat. As already noted, Kim walks the dog at all hours of the day or night, sometimes in the slum sections of Hong Kong, sometimes in the fashionable quarter of Kowloon. The reader even finds her on the ferry. The three policemen who interrupt the party wear various uniforms, from khaki shorts and white socks to full battle dress. They are wearing battle dress when they arrest Johnson. The party they interrupt is also at different stages each time. Sometimes the refreshment table is fully loaded, sometimes empty. Sometimes

the guests are paralyzed by fear, sometimes they are completely indifferent. Contradictory scenes continue all through the book, and any scene which is repeated is never quite the same as the last time it appeared.

Probably the most puzzling contradiction is Johnson, who keeps slipping in and out of first person. The reader, of course, is never told that "je" is Johnson, but too much evidence links them together for "je" to be anybody else. The oneiric quality of the scenes may suggest a solution, because, as one critic suggests, it is only in dreams that a person can watch himself.[31]

Contradictions seem to spin off the narrative in all directions, but the opposing force of linkings creates a tension which holds the narrative together. As a geometric figure, the narrative might be thought of as a circle, from which the tangent lines of contradiction spread, the ends of which are connected by straight lines representing the linkings, drawn across the circle from the end of one tangent line to another, forming a grid. The idea of a grid or pattern in Robbe-Grillet's work which is imposed on reality has been suggested.[32]

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[31]John Weightman, "Alain Robbe-Grillet," The Novelist as Philosopher: Studies in French Fiction 1935-1960 (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 250.

[32]Naomi Bliven, "Review of Robbe-Grillet's For a New Novel," New Yorker, XLII (April 9, 1966), 165-68.

CHAPTER XV

LINKINGS

As already noted, the first paragraph of La Maison de rendez-vous contains threads which stretch out through the whole of the book. Other connections are scattered through the story: the mannequin in the shop window and Kim's face as clear as porcelain, her varnished mouth, her enamel blue eyes (p. 104); the telephone number of the S.L.S. (Société pour la lutte contre les stupéfiants) 1-234-567 which appears in a luridly illustrated magazine showing the effects of drugs. The red-faced man who is describing the illustrations does not understand Chinese, so he misinterprets it to his incredulous listener as an advertisement for a low grade house of pleasure (pp.80-81). At another time Lady Ava gives Johnson her new telephone number: 1-234-567. Still farther in the book, S.L.S. appears as "South Liberation Soviet" and may be a spy ring or a front for drug traffic or white slavery. The statues in the garden of the Villa Bleue resemble the grotesque statuary in the Tiger Balm Gardens in Hong Kong (p. 29). Johnson is in Hong Kong to develop a preparation which will outsell Tiger Balm (p. 166).

The disconcerting changes of scene, which sometimes occur in the middle of a sentence will usually

refer back in some way to the preceding scene, much in the manner that daydreaming produces a wide variety of images, but each one connected to the one before. For example, The Eurasian servant girl connects two scenes on pages thirty-eight and thirty-nine. The reader sees her stepping through the debris of broken glass at the party, and toward the end of this long sentence which takes up most of the page, she is walking the black dog along a deserted street in the afternoon. As the narrator watches or thinks of the girl walking at the party, she continues to walk in his mind but with a different background. In another example, a long scene of Lady Ava at first onstage, then shifting to her chamber, is closing, and by means of a verb change from penser to dire the reader finds himself back to the key scene of the red-faced man talking to Johnson, and it is possible that he has been telling Johnson about this scene all the time (p. 106).

This key scene, which recurs fourteen times, first appears in one sentence:

> Mais deux personnages s'avancent et masquent bientôt la scène, une haute silhouette en smoking sombre, à qui un gros homme au teint rouge parle de ses voyages (p. 13).

Again and again the reader will watch these two men talking. Possibly the red-faced man's recital of his "voyages" reveals itself through the unfolding of events

as well as through the course of the evening. Sometimes his conversation, quoted or reported, seems to sum up preceding scenes or to anticipate future scenes. In the second appearance of this scene, he is talking about the beautiful silks to be found in Hong Kong (p. 16). The scene just prior to this conversation describes in detail the narrow slit silk dresses worn by Hong Kong girls. In the next appearance of the two men, he is not talking, but is smiling vaguely at nobody (p. 17). The scene previous to this describes a rickshaw pulled by a coolie who is trotting so fast that the rickshaw, which quickly disappears, must be empty. At another appearance of the scene, he is now discussing aphrodisiacs and white slavery, and mentions that a father once visited a brothel and found his daughter there (p. 130). Ten pages later, Lady Ava is telling the narrator that Manneret is the supposed father of Kim and Lucky.

The scene of the red-faced man and his companion may be the core around which the play of scenes revolves. All scenes seem to point to it or spread from it, as almost every event in the book is foretold, summed up, or at least referred to in an oblique manner during the conversation. Circular structure has been used by Robbe-Grillet in his books and films, and seems to mold the form of La Maison de rendez-vous. Both in time and in

space the reader returns again and again to this key scene as in a labyrinth which he has entered at ten past nine that evening. In a series of slow revolutions, each of which returns him to this scene, he progresses through the evening, experiencing at the same time many regressions and digressions. A little over halfway through the book, the reader finds himself again viewing Hong Kong: ". . . tout le monde connaît Hong-Kong, sa rade, . . ." (p. 141). He returns four times to the beginning of the evening with Johnson arriving at the party at ten minutes past nine on pages 23, 52, 96, and 201. If Johnson's arrival is the entrance to the labyrinth, his arrest can be considered as the exit where both he and the reader reach the end of the evening.

CHAPTER XVI

REPRESENTATIONS

Robbe-Grillet heightens the feeling of make-believe by his integration of human representations of all kinds into the texture of the story. Now reality is not only once removed by interior vision, but twice removed by interior vision plus representation. He used a picture in Dans le labyrinthe, a calendar in La Jalousie, a play in the film L'Année dernière à Marienbad in the same manner. In La Maison de rendez-vous Lady Ava is presenting a play in the little theater of her villa. The play seems to be in four acts, with divertissements. One act shows Lauren and either Johnson or Marchand in the garden in a dramatic scene of farewell, renunciation, or possibly Marchand's suicide. Sometimes this scene is taking place in the garden of the Villa Bleue. The assassination of Édouard Manneret is another act, which may be taking place on the stage or in Manneret's apartment. Lady Ava plays a scene alone where she is either onstage or in her chamber. In contrast to these three acts which are Occidental in concept, Kito's performance is a "jeu de déshabillage" in the style of Seu-Tchouan. A divertissement, "Meurtres rituels," in the form of a puppet show, follows Kito's act and uses the same setting (p. 99).

Many theatrical terms as well as words denoting uncertainty constantly warn the reader of fabrication: (Capital letters are not in text) "Tout à coup le DÉCOR change" (p. 31); ". . . dressent autour de moi leur DÉCOR insistant, provocateur" (p. 12); ". . . il s'agit du centre de L'IMAGE" (p. 36); "La SCÈNE qui se déroule alors manque de netteté" (p. 39); "Dans un dernier TABLEAU, on voit Édouard Manneret . . ." (p. 73). Sometimes the narrator even wonders if there was a spectacle that evening: "(Si je ne me trompe pas, du moins, en pensant qu'il y avait une représentation ce soir.)" (p. 137).

Even the representations which are imitating reality sometimes strike the narrator as artificial. Lauren holds her right hand in front of her with fingers spread as if against a glass wall (p. 26). Kito does not seem to assume a realistic pose when the black dog lunges at her. The narrator concludes that the unnatural pose is intended to heighten the esthetic effect (p. 44).

Statuary is another form of human representation used in La Maison de rendez-vous. Lady Ava's garden is full of statues in the manner of the Tiger Balm Gardens in Hong Kong, a sight most tourists go to see. These statues depict scenes from Burmese mythology with such titles as «Les Chiens», «L'Esclave», «La Mise à mort».

The statue «L'Appat», already described in the garden, appears on the stage as a divertissement with Kito as the bait. The hunter wears dark glasses, and a black dog replaces the tiger (pp. 31-32). In the garden it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the guests from the statues (p. 58).

In the third appearance of the red-faced man, the narrator notices that he is wearing a Chinese ring (p. 20). In the seventh appearance of this man, his ring becomes the scene of Kim (or a girl like her) lying on a divan, drugged, holding an empty syringe (pp. 75-76).

This scene is repeated in a cheap magazine a street sweeper picks up, and becomes part of a series showing the progress of drug addiction from deception to enslavement to death. On the last picture appears the notation of «S.L.S. Tel.: 1-234-567» (p. 80). The first time the reader saw this magazine, the street sweeper was pushing it into the gutter with his broom while watching Kim walk by with the black dog. The cover represented a soiree in a large, elegant salon (pp.35-36).

In La Jalousie a native song seemed to describe the structure of the book. Music is mentioned twice in La Maison de rendez-vous. Music at the soiree is ". . . une sorte de rengaine à répétitions cycliques, où l'on reconnaît toujours les mêmes passages à intervalles

réguliers . . ." (p. 64). In the little music room, Lauren plays a modern composition ". . . pleine de ruptures et de trous, qu'elle ponctue de rires nerveux, soudains, sans durée, signalant des fausses notes qu'elle est la seule à pouvoir reconnaître . . ." (p. 203). Both of these statements might describe the style and structure of the book.

CHAPTER XVII

STYLE

In the tradition of French writing, Robbe-Grillet's style is clear and precise. Although his sentences are long, reminiscent perhaps of Proustian style, the reader does not become lost in them. His style is neither coupé nor oratoire but always he uses "le mot juste." It is a cool, detached style which can speak of the most outlandish events as if they were quite ordinary happenings. His precise descriptions somehow make prostitution, torture and perversion quite unobjectionable. Even though he describes in a flat, impersonal manner and does not use an elevated vocabulary, his descriptions are poetic and evocative. The use of the present indicative and the present perfect tenses gives the reader a feeling of immediacy and participation. Sometimes the narrative will switch from present to present perfect in the middle of a scene, as if to bring the reader up to date, and then proceed (p. 138). The narrator begins his story in the present perfect: "Je suis arrivé à la Villa Bleue . . ." (p. 23). Other times he tells of his arrival in the present. The present tense is used consistently to describe arrested gestures and frozen actions. When scenes become confused, the tenses take on a jumpy

quality: (underlining is not in text) "La scène qui se déroule alors manque de netteté . . . La fille . . . gravit l'escalier . . . et presque aussitôt, elle redescendrait en tenant contre sa poitrine . . ." (p. 39). Careful search yielded only one use of the literary simple past tense (p. 23) when the narrator indicates the beginning of his story. The use of noun clauses in descriptions of scenes tends to disembody the people described, surrounding them with vagueness: ". . . les danseurs qui se sont arrêtés . . ."; ". . . la servante eurasienne qui traverse le cercle . . ."; ". . . les couples qui continuent . . ."; ". . . éloignée du cavalier qui la dirige . . ." (p. 65).

The short stories of Robbe-Grillet have not been carefully studied,[33] but they would undoubtedly reveal sources for La Maison de rendez-vous. In particular, the story, "La Chambre secrète,"[34] dedicated to the decadent painter Gustave Moreau may relate to La Maison de rendez-vous, although it is gory far beyond any scene in the book. The street sweeper watching Kim's legs as she walks by may recall "Dans les Couloirs du métropolitain."[35]

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[33]Morrissette, Alain Robbe-Grillet, p. 12.

[34]Alain Robbe-Grillet, Instantanés (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1962), pp. 97-109.

[35]Ibid., pp.77-93.

Whether or not "le vieux roi fou Boris," who walks around upstairs tapping his cane in La Maison de rendez-vous has any connection with Boris of a hitherto unpublished story, "Une fois de plus, c'est au bord de la mer,"[36] is debatable but possible.

As in any writer's work, various elements of La Maison de rendez-vous recall other writers. Robbe-Grillet inserted a series of essays on writers whose works interest him in Pour un nouveau roman, and mentions others in various other sections of the book. The scene in La Maison de rendez-vous of Kim looking for the broker M. Tchang and stumbling into a meeting of deaf mutes resembles, in its tone, the courtroom scene of Kafka's The Trial.[37] A precursor of surrealism, Raymond Roussel, interests Robbe-Grillet in ways which seem to relate to Robbe-Grillet's own work. In his essay on Roussel, Robbe-Grillet mentions specific qualities of Roussel's writing, qualities which also preoccupy him: research which destroys its own object by writing, plastic reproduction, an imaginative view, instantaneousness, a universe which is not three-dimensional, but flat and

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[36] Livres de France: Revue littéraire mensuelle, (No. 8, Octobre, 1965), 15.

[37] Franz Kafka, The Trial (New York: Random House, 1956), pp. 39-60.

discontinuous.[38] Although the new novel does not travel under the banner of surrealism, many of its effects are surrealistic. In Robbe-Grillet's work, the imaginative, dreamlike quality combined with extreme matter-of-factness is suggestive of the surrealistic approach. An exploration of surrealistic elements in his work could prove fruitful.

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[38]Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman, pp. 92-95.

CHAPTER XVIII

CONCLUSIONS

It would be possible to investigate the work of Robbe-Grillet in many ways not probed here. A study of his philosophical attitude with reference to phenomenology, the pathological aspect of his subject matter, the elements of comedy and parody could no doubt provide many more keys to the meaning of his work. No single approach assures an answer. The apparent transparency of his flat prose hides many enigmas, the solution of which remains to be attacked. Already Robbe-Grillet enjoys an increasing reputation and exerts a considerable influence on the novel. If he has been criticized for overemphasis on objects, he has at least put them "there," back into the novel as a presence. If he has been accused of abstruseness, he has perhaps led his readers into a Wonderland which actually simulates their private worlds. The world is "there" every day, for each to interpret in his own consciousness. To be confronted with another's interpretation, seemingly expressed at its moment of occurrence, is a dizzying experience. Uncertainties, gropings, misapprehensions are all a part of it. But the experience of a work of art, which is a glimpse of the world structured by another sensibility, can help each

individual come to terms with his own world.

Whether posterity will see fit to support or to repudiate Robbe-Grillet remains in the uncertain future. He has said in his essay, "A quoi servent les théories?", that there are no masterpieces, only works in history which survive in leaving the past behind and announcing the future.[39] Perhaps Robbe-Grillet stands among those who point the way.

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[39]Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman, p. 11.

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